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ABSTRACT

This bulletin is part of an ongoing project to recognize and build upon the power of youth leadership. The goal is to use communication and action to enable youth to have a positive impact on their communities. This bulletin serves as a training manual on how to conduct a special event. Special events can address a variety of problems ranging from a lack of community attention to a particular issue to a need for alternative behaviors among some community members. The special event can focus on child safety; afterprom drinking; gang activity; or any problems that need to be addressed by community awareness and action. Information on planning an event is organized by the number of weeks prior to the event so that planners can organize sequentially what needs to be accomplished. Information is provided on how to measure the success of the event for future planning. A number of resources are provided for additional information on community action. (JDM)

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NATIONAL YOUTH NETWORK

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Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

BULLETIN

NCJ 180130

Plan A Special Event!

What Is a Special Event?

A special event is an activity that focuses on an important issue, such as child safety; celebrates success; builds a sense of community; provides a positive activity for youth to participate in; raises funds; or educates and enlists the support of community members on a specific topic. A special event can be a party, an information fair, a carwash for charity, a child safety day, a race, a street fair, or a community picnic. The only limit is your imagination!

What Problems Do Special Events Address?

Special events address a variety of problems, ranging from lack of community attention to a particular issue to a need for alternatives to gang- or drug-related behavior. These events can also provide publicity for worthy programs or recognition for achievements. If underage drinking after the prom is a problem, an alcohol- and drug-free postprom party provides an alternative. A walk-a-thon to benefit a local charity similarly heightens awareness while raising funds for a deserving organization, program, or foundation.

How Does a Special Event Prevent or Reduce Crime?

A special event can also help prevent or reduce crime in your school or community. For instance, a 5K "safety" race—in which participants secure sponsors and hand out crime prevention tips from the local police department—will educate citizens on how to make their community safer and raise money for community crime prevention. An alcohol- and drug-free concert or a fundraiser for a youth community center will similarly rally the community around a cause and offer positive activities for young people.

from the administrator

Looking for an exciting new way to generate publicity, raise funds, or educate the public about an important community issue? Then plan a special event! A special event—such as a walk-a-thon, postprom party, carwash, picnic, or fair—offers a great opportunity for you to draw the community's attention to your concerns and to inform them of what you and your friends are doing to make a difference. If you follow the step-by-step instructions and practical guidance provided by this Bulletin, your special event is sure to be a success!

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How Do You Plan a Special Event?

First, recognize that you need a team. Recruit people who like to plan, who are skilled at handling logistics (such as organizing parking, purchasing supplies, and coordinating volunteers), and who can come up with original ideas for event- and cause-related publicity. Instead of simply holding a car wash, for example, your group may decide to host a community clean-up day, a dance-a-thon, a senior-youth picnic, or an alcohol-free postprom brunch.

Next, involve your team in planning. Bring together a core group to identify a date for your event (be sure that no other major community or school events conflict with that date), decide on the type of event, select the location (making sure that it's available on your chosen date), and determine the types of committees you'll need to make the event a success.

Even though committees perform most of the work, select an event chairperson to coordinate and supervise the entire process. You may want to form an honorary board or enlist the support of local sponsors (school administrators, civic officials, business people, or local officials, for example) as well.

Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network's Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. *This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:*

- *Assessing Your Community's Needs.*
- *Planning a Successful Project.*
- *Lining Up Resources.*
- *Acting on Your Plans.*
- *Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.*

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section. Good luck!

Keep track of the resources you'll need. Brainstorm about ways to obtain donations or borrow equipment. Visit local businesses and explain what your event is, what causes it hopes to benefit, and how it may prevent or reduce crime in your community. Ask the sanitation department to provide trash cans and the recreation department to lend you any sports equipment needed for the event. Consult local government or police officials to find out whether any permit fees can be waived. Agree to recognize publicly the businesses and other organizations that donate items or services, so they are acknowledged for their commitment. Even with all these cost-cutting strategies, remember that some things required for your event will cost money.

Your team can use the checklist on pages 3–5 for any special event—whether a celebration of your program's achievements, a drug- and alcohol-free graduation party, or a children's safety day. How far in advance you need to start depends on the size and complexity of your event and your team's experience with these types of activities. Use the planning weeks indicated as approximate guidelines. The sooner you start the better, and not every event will require all listed steps. Review the checklist at your first meeting and decide which steps are necessary for your event.

What Does It Take To Sustain a Special Event?

Some special events happen only once, such as a special anniversary of your youth program. Other events take place on a regular basis—like Crime Prevention Month every October or an alcohol-free gala the first weekend in April each year. Whether it's an annual event or a one-time happening, a special event requires dedicated leadership and committed volunteers. These two components will provide the spark to make special events a success.

16 to 20 Weeks Before the Event

Decide what occasion, issue, or problem to address and the kind of event you will host.

- ◇ Decide who will chair the event.
- ◇ Recruit key volunteers.
- ◇ Decide whether to sponsor the event with a partner (that is, another group or organization in your community that would be willing to plan and host the event with you). Think about the possible resources and special skills that a partner would bring to your venture and the type of publicity or special attention that a partner would generate.
- ◇ If your group decides to have a partner, consider selecting an honorary chairperson who may—depending on his or her position and prior experience—be able to generate added publicity and enthusiasm for your event.
- ◇ Bring everyone together and answer the following questions:
  - ❖ What are your goals? How will you measure success?
  - ❖ When do you want to have your event? Will any other events conflict with your date? Do you have a rain date?
  - ❖ Where will you hold your event? Is the place available? Consider seating, parking, accessibility for people with disabilities, transportation, and any permit that may be required.
  - ❖ How much money will you need? How can you obtain donations? Do you need a fundraiser?
  - ❖ Who will attend your event? How many people can you accommodate?
  - ❖ How long will your event last?
  - ❖ Who will serv e on what committee? Typical committees include: awards and prizes, entertainment and publicity, exhibits and information, food, decorations, and invitations and hospitality. Recruit volunteers for each committee and appoint committee chairpersons who have the time, energy, and commitment to do the work.
- ◇ Decide if tickets will be required for admission and, if so, how much they will cost, and where and when they will be sold.

12 to 16 Weeks Before the Event

- ◇ Direct the committee in charge of exhibits to send invitations to groups or individuals who may want to set up exhibits at your event. The invitation should include the purpose, date, time, and place of your event; potential benefits for the exhibitors; and any signup requirements.
- ◇ Appoint a lead person to be in charge of publicity and drawing people (such as local TV and radio station personalities) to your event. This person should work closely with any honorary chairperson your group has selected.
- ◇ Meet with committee heads regularly, offer help when needed, and monitor their progress.

8 to 12 Weeks Before the Event

- ◇ Arrange for any required payment of contractors, such as table and tent rental companies.
- ◇ Order T-shirts, hats, or other items of clothing for your volunteers to wear on the day of the special event. Having volunteers dress alike—in a T-shirt featuring your group's name or logo, or in an unusual colored sweatshirt, for example—will make these persons easy to recognize and may promote a feeling of teamwork.
- ◇ Begin selling tickets, if appropriate.

Invitations and Hospitality Committee

- ◇ Work with the Publicity Committee to design any fliers, signs, or other notices. Post them 4 to 6 weeks before the event.
- ◇ Invite local celebrities to participate.
- ◇ Give the Food Committee a preliminary estimate of how many people will attend.
- ◇ Make sure you have adequate parking, handicapped access, restrooms, and a secure place for coats (don't forget hangers).
- ◇ Purchase or secure donations of first-aid kits, fire extinguishers, and cell phones. Make a list of emergency phone numbers to have on hand.

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◇ Make name tags and site maps for workers and exhibitors.

◇ Tell the Decorations Committee how many tables will be needed.

◇ Recruit volunteers to be greeters and runners. Assign greeters to accompany celebrity guests.

Awards and Prizes Committee

◇ Decide on criteria for any awards to be given at the event, and recruit judges to select award winners. Arrange to have the honorary cochair or a community leader present the awards.

◇ Ask local businesses to donate awards and door prizes.

◇ Order "novelty" items, such as balloons, T-shirts, key chains, or pens and pencils with your group's name or logo.

Entertainment and Publicity Committee

◇ Plan activities and entertainment. Arrange for any necessary stage, sound, and audiovisual equipment.

◇ Reproduce educational materials such as brochures and bookmarks.

◇ Develop a media contact list. Introduce yourself to contacts at local radio stations and newspapers and ask them to publicize your event. Radio stations may accept and broadcast public service announcements (PSA's) on your event at no cost. Usually one person at a radio station is in charge of PSA's. For each station, find out who that person is and work with him or her to arrange free air time. Most radio stations require groups wishing to broadcast PSA's to submit proof of their nonprofit status, a script of the 30–60 second announcement, and a statement about the importance of the message. Submit this information approximately 3–4 weeks before the event. Newspapers similarly set aside space to list community events at no charge. Find out who is in charge of these listings at your local paper and submit all necessary information to him or her.

◇ Prepare a press release—a summary statement that contains all important information about your event, including when and where it will take place, the causes it will benefit, and how to get involved—and send it to your media contacts at least 1 week before the event. At the same time, send contacts an "information kit" on your event that includes fliers, brochures, bookmarks, T-shirts, posters, and any other promotional items, a schedule of events, and a list of sponsors, exhibitors, and local celebrities participating in the event.

◇ Recruit an experienced photographer to take pictures at the event. A school or community photography club may be able to suggest or provide someone willing to donate his or her services.

◇ Be available on the day of the event to meet and greet media representatives and answer their questions.

Exhibits and Information Committee

◇ Follow up on invitations to exhibitors and verify who will attend. Send confirmation letters.

◇ Estimate the total number of exhibitors and determine space/table requirements. Be sure to include a display table for brochures and product giveaways.

◇ Recruit volunteers to help exhibitors unload, set up, and pack up materials.

◇ Develop event-day instructions for all volunteers, addressing such subjects as when to arrive, where to report, and how to deal with an emergency.

Food and Decorations Committee

◇ Decide what type of decorations to use and where they will be placed.

◇ Map out where to set up exhibits, displays, food, entertainment, and registration. Pay attention to the location of electrical outlets.

◇ Make promotional signs, directional signs, and posters.

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- ◇ If serving refreshments, arrange for all required tables, tablecloths, chairs, napkins, cups, plates, and utensils for food, and recruit and organize volunteers to prepare and serve food.
- ◇ Arrange for the delivery and placement of tables, chairs, and other supplies needed for exhibits, awards, and other displays.
- ◇ Recruit volunteers for setup and cleanup.
- ◇ Arrange to have any unused food or drink delivered to a shelter or other facility in your area that accepts such donations.

1 Week Before the Event

- ◇ Send a copy of your press release and an information kit to every media contact. Call to confirm coverage of your event.
- ◇ Purchase utensils, paper goods, decorations, and nonperishable food items.
- ◇ Confirm all deliveries and pickups.
- ◇ Give the Food Committee a final count of how many people are expected to attend.

1 Day Before the Event

- ◇ Pick up orders and arrange deliveries.
- ◇ Test audiovisual, sound, and other equipment.
- ◇ If possible, set up tables and decorations.
- ◇ Purchase perishable food items and prepare food.
- ◇ Do a final review to make sure all checklist items have been completed.

The Big Day!

- ◇ Complete decorations.
- ◇ Set up tables, stage, and audiovisual equipment.
- ◇ Put first-aid kits, fire extinguishers, phones, and emergency phone numbers in locations that are readily accessible but out of the way. Tell volunteers where to find these items.
- ◇ Approximately 30 minutes before your event begins, brief volunteer greeters, helpers, and runners. Answer any questions and make sure everyone is ready to go.
- ◇ Thank all donors, volunteers, partners, media representatives, and celebrities.
- ◇ Relax and have a great event!

After the Event

- ◇ Clean up.
- ◇ Return all borrowed equipment and supplies, and deliver unused food and beverages to the local shelter or facility that agreed to accept your donation.
- ◇ Send thank-you letters to all who helped make the event a success.
- ◇ Take notes about what you experienced, writing down what to do differently in the future and what went especially well.
- ◇ Meet with your committee chairpersons for a postevent evaluation.

What Are Some of the Challenges You Will Face?

Special events are time consuming and require many dedicated volunteers. As shown by the checklist above, volunteers may need to devote a great deal of time—over a period of several months—to plan and carry out a successful event. Special events can also be expensive, especially if you don't have the support of sponsors or donors willing to provide materials and services.

Some annual special events may require a few years to become firmly established. Don't be disappointed if your event isn't as well attended as you had hoped in its first year. If it was well planned and executed and if your volunteers were enthusiastic and committed, more people will take part next time.

What Are Some of the Rewards?

A successful special event will bring positive attention to your program, ranging from new sources of funding and more volunteers to publicity about the event and appreciation for your program. It will also teach group members and other volunteers valuable organizational skills and allow them to experience the satisfaction of a job well done. In addition, special events strengthen community ties by allowing youth—especially those working with partners or cosponsors—to build bridges with community organizations. By working on the event with community leaders, local business owners, and media representatives youth may also develop an understanding of others' perspectives and skills. Adults, in turn, will appreciate your group's dedication and hard work and may even overcome previous negative opinions or fears of young people.

How Can Special Events Be Evaluated?

Evaluating your event can help you learn whether it has met its goals, but only if you decide up front what you want to evaluate and how you will go about doing so. The purpose of conducting any evaluation is "to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down."[1] In particular, you will want to be able to show that your special event did one or all of the following:

- ◇ Ran smoothly and approximately on schedule.
- ◇ Involved a wide segment of your community—from youth to media representatives to special target audiences.
- ◇ Raised awareness or educated the public on an important crime prevention or other community issue.
- ◇ Generated favorable publicity for your group and its efforts.

The best way to start evaluating your event is to reflect on your original goals. Did you plan an event and host it? Was it well attended? Did your community get involved? Be sure to include an evaluation step—such as a survey for attendees or exhibitors to complete at the end of the event—in your overall plan. Ask yourself what you can do better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your project, and to spread your message to a wider audience. Then, make adjustments to your activities to improve your special event.

Base your evaluation on both the specific goals you set and any other benefits that may have resulted. For example, your group's goal in deciding to host an open house may have been to find three new funding sources. As a result of the event, you may have gained only one new funding source but recruited three new volunteers and received excellent media coverage in your community. With these results, you may decide to continue with the open house next year and look for funding sources elsewhere.

One very good way to capture feedback while celebrating successes is to organize a postevent debriefing. Attendance should be mandatory for committee chairpersons and important operational people and optional for all other volunteers. Make the debriefing a pleasant experience. Serve refreshments, welcome and thank everyone, and explain the process for the meeting. Basically, all staff and volunteers will share their ideas on the positive and the negative aspects of your special event.

At the start of your meeting, choose someone to write everyone's comments on a flip chart and appoint a recordkeeper who will take careful notes and type them later for distribution to the whole group. Next, ask everyone to take a few minutes and write two lists: what the group should continue doing when planning and hosting its next special event (and why); and

[1] National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

what it should change (and how). Explain that you will ask each person to share one thing at a time from his or her lists, and that you will go around the room until each point on every person's list has been noted by the recordkeeper. Begin the discussion with the "what we should keep" list and then focus on the "what we should change" list. The person writing at the flip chart and the recordkeeper will draw stars next to any repeated items. In this way, everyone will see what people think worked well and what they believe needs improvement.

Ask yourself what you can do better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your event, and to spread your message to a wider audience. Then, adjust your activities to strengthen your event.

In evaluating your special event, also consider whether and how it meets the following more general crime prevention goals:

- ◇ Reduces crime and fear of crime.
- ◇ Educates and informs a target audience.
- ◇ Is cost effective.
- ◇ Has a lasting impact.
- ◇ Attracts support and resources.
- ◇ Makes people feel safe and more positive about being a member of your school or community.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a skill you can apply to all aspects of your life. Good luck and—Have a great event!

Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at www.usdoj.gov/kidspage. This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

Association of Junior Leagues, Inc.
660 First Avenue
New York, NY 10016
212–683–1515
212–481–7196 (Fax)

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849–6000
800–638–8736
301–519–5212 (Fax)
Internet: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org

National Crime Prevention Council
1700 K Street NW., Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006–3817
202–466–6272
202–296–1356 (Fax)
Internet: www.ncpc.org.

National Family Partnership
9220 Southwest Barbur Boulevard, #119–284
Portland, OR 97219
888–311–1933
503–768–9659
503–244–5506 (Fax)
Internet: www.nfp.org

Teens, Crime, and the Community
1700 K Street NW., Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006–3817
202–466–6272
202–296–1356 (Fax)
Internet: www.nationaltcc.org

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The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.